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U.S. Found to Breed Many Spies, But Even More Aren't Prosecuted

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LOS ANGELES, Dec. 19 — With a record number of people facing spying charges, Federal investigators say that an even larger number of Americans committed acts of espionage in the last year but were not prosecuted.

The reasons, they said, range from legal technicalities to the Government's unwillingness to disclose what secrets had been offered to foreign agents.

"There are a considerable number of cases of espionage that are not prosecuted," said George L. Mozingo, who supervises the Federal Bureau of Investigation's counterespionage activities in the high-technology area south of San Francisco.

A New Breed of Spy

And experts say they may be contending with a new breed of spy: a person with access to classified information who has no historical sense of patriotism and is inspired by novels and films about spies.

On Tuesday, after the Justice Department announced the arrest of the fifth American charged with espionage this year, William H. Webster, Director of the F.B.I., said, "We have more people charged with espionage right now than ever before in our history."

The man arrested Tuesday, Thomas Patrick Cavanaugh, a 40-year-old engineer employed by the Northrop Corporation here, was charged with offering to sell information about a new, highly secret Air Force bomber to agents of the bureau posing as Soviet spies.

22 Accused Spies in 5 Years

He was the ninth person, including four Americans, to be charged with espionage in the United States this year. His arrest brings the number of people charged with espionage since 1979 to 22, including five last year, according to bureau officials.

Security experts offer several theories to explain why America seems to be producing so many spies these days.

Some F.B.I. officials attribute the increase in cases in large part to the bureau's expanded efforts to catch spies, a factor that may be true in some recent instances but not all of them.

Indeed, several Americans charged with espionage in recent years had dealt with foreign agents for long periods before being caught as a result of their own mistakes, not the bureau's vigilance or investigation, investigators said. Richard Miller, one of the Americans charged recently with spying, was himself an F.B.I. counterintelligence specialist.

'O.K. to Be Disloyal'

A security executive at a California defense plant, commenting on condition that he not be named, said:

"What people forget is that you have a lot of people working in sensitive positions now who weren't alive during World War II, when everybody shared a real sense of patriotism, a love of country. A lot of the people we're getting now were in college during the Vietnam era, when it was O.K. to be disloyal to your Government."

Another reason for the increase, security specialists say, is that never before has there been such a high-stakes international conflict under way in which knowledge and technology were so important.

Many of the recent spy cases have occurred in California, where thousands of people at hundreds of plants are developing new missiles and other weapons, space satellites and advanced electronic components.

The malcontent, the adventurer, the alcoholic or the drug abuser who passes the generally superficial background security checks the Government conducts before allowing them access to classified documents can discover quickly that a few sheets of paper can be traded to Soviet agents for a stack of $100 bills.

According to espionage historians, most spies in the past were motivated by one of two factors: ideology and money. A somewhat different pattern has emerged in recent years, according to counterespionage specialists.

Money, they say, is still by far the biggest factor that lures Americans into committing espionage, despite what one retired intelligence officer says is ample evidence that the Soviet Union has little sympathy or loyalty toward such mercenary spies and ultimately abandons most of them, allowing them to be caght when their usefulness is gone.

If there is one factor that makes an American with access to Government secrets susceptible to becoming a spy, Mr. Mozingo said, it is a desperate need for money.

While money is still a prime factor in espionage, investigators say relatively few of America's known recent spies have been motivated by ideological factors, as was the ring of pro-Soviet Americans who sent many of America's atomic bomb secrets to Moscow in World War II and the immediate postwar era.

Fictional Fantasies Come Alive

Instead, specialists say, a dangerous new breed of spy has emerged in recent years: the man or woman with access to classified information who is excited by the action and intrigue of spy novels and movies and decides to live out fictional fantasies.

Time and again in recent years, investigators say, in searching the homes of accused of being spies they have found stacks of spy novels and other evidence showing how otherwise ordinary people turned to espionage not just for money but also for excitement.

Also common among those recently convicted of espionage has been a tendency to rationalize the decision to sell out their country. "They may say to themselves," one security specialist said, "that 'the Russians can read all about this in the aerospace trade journals anyway, so why shouldn't I make some money on it?'"

Revenge is another common motivating factor; several of the recent American spies have justified their behavior to themselves by contending they had been wronged by an employer or the Government and were thus entitled to some reparations by selling American secrets.

Despite the recent increase in espionage arrests, investigators say there are undoubtedly many more spies still active within the military and intelligence establishments and that some may never be caught.

Expanded counterespionage operations, improved background checks and polygraph, or lie-detector, tests for employees in the most sensitive jobs can limit the damage but not end the problem, investigators say.

"You can put someone through the greatest background check in the world," one security official said. "But you can't read his mind and predict what he will do under every circumstance. It all all boils down to trust. When you put somebody in one of these jobs, you have to trust him."